

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**The Terrorist Threat:
Are United States Diplomatic Facilities Overseas Safe?**

by

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The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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This paper examines the threat to U.S. government personnel and diplomatic facilities overseas. After successful terrorist attacks in the 1980's and 1990's, the Inman Commission (1985) and the Crowe Accountability Review Boards (1998) issued findings, lessons learned, and recommendations regarding perceived vulnerabilities and how to address them. This paper assesses the current level of security for diplomatic facilities overseas in the context of present and future threats. While physical, procedural, and operational security improvements are necessary and create a safer working environment, improved intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination is the key to keeping employees and the facilities in which they work secure.

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PREFACE

I would like to thank Mike Beckner, my friend and mentor for more than fifteen years, for his invaluable assistance and guidance during the writing of this research project.

THE TERRORIST THREAT: ARE UNITED STATES DIPLOMATIC FACILITIES OVERSEAS SAFE?

The worst international terrorist attack in history occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001. Nineteen hijackers belonging to the al Qaeda terrorist network, in a coordinated operation, took control of four commercial aircraft. The results are well documented. By 10:30 a.m. that day, more than 3000 people from 78 countries had been murdered. Practically every nation around the world condemned the attack and on September 20, the United States declared war on the al Qaeda. The international war on terrorism had begun.

On October 8, 2001, President Bush established the Office of Homeland Security within the White House and directed that a comprehensive national strategy for homeland security be produced. The strategy would be based on principles of cooperation and partnership among: federal, state, and local governments and law enforcement; the military; the private sector; and the American public.¹ The nation awaits the standing up of the Department of Homeland Security, which will employ over 170,000 personnel and absorb the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the U. S. Coast Guard, the U. S. Secret Service, as well as many other federal organizations and agencies.

In the meantime, the government has made significant progress in providing protection for the general public and securing the borders in order to make the United States a safer country in which to live. However, this progress comes at a huge cost. Including supplemental funding, the Congress allocated \$17 billion to homeland security in fiscal year 2001, \$29 billion in fiscal year 2002. In fiscal year 2003, \$38 billion was budgeted for homeland security. The White House characterizes "These budget allocations...as down payments to cover the most immediate security vulnerabilities."² These efforts and expenditure are both justifiable and appropriate to transform the country into a nation less vulnerable to future terrorist attacks during the global war on terrorism.

On February 23, 1998, the World Islamic Front issued the following statement: "We issue the following *fatwa* to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - civilians and military - is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it...We – with God's help – call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it."³ The World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the unknown target of United Airlines flight 93 (possibly the White House or the Capitol building) are

symbols of the United States, our power and what we stand for as a nation. Their destruction would be consistent with the *fatwa* and serve a political purpose as well.

In almost all countries around the world, the most identifiable, highest profile symbol of the United States is the American Embassy in the capital city or the American Consulate in one or more of the other cities in country. U. S. foreign policy is developed, implemented, and enunciated within 160 embassies and 78 consulates worldwide. These facilities have over 5000 American foreign service employees that serve their country. In addition, many of these facilities have repeatedly been the targets of terrorist attacks for more than twenty years. Between 1987 and 1997, terrorists made 92 actual or attempted attacks against U. S. embassies or consulates, the majority of which were bombings.⁴ The ongoing efforts to reduce vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks within the United States must also take into account these visible foreign targets. Will American diplomatic facilities overseas now be the next targets? What physical security programs are in place to safeguard U. S. missions and the employees working in them? Do these measures provide adequate protection? Can key vulnerabilities be significantly addressed? What must be done in the future to insure the safety of U.S. government employees abroad? An examination of past terrorist attacks, the resulting physical security standards for diplomatic facilities, and the extent to which these have been implemented in the context of the current threat situation provide some of the answers to these vexing problems.

HOW DID ALL THIS START?

Historically, as countries developed bi-lateral relationships, they have exchanged diplomatic representatives. Traditionally, ambassadors have served as the first line of peace brokers and emissaries of good faith to be treated with respect and afforded protection and security. This practice became critical to effective relations between states. Diplomatic immunity from host country detention, incarceration and criminal prosecution was widely recognized and accepted. As the new nation of the United States of America initiated formal diplomatic relations with other countries, embassies headed by ambassadors established many bilateral relations and facilitated the conduct of foreign policy. Although American diplomats and facilities occasionally suffered random violence, it was not until the years following World War II that large, often violent, demonstrations and state-directed harassment against diplomats became commonplace in the Eastern European countries.

In response to the growing number of terrorist attacks against U. S. missions in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Department of State (DOS) created the Office of Counterterrorism

in 1973 to formulate policy and programs to counter the increasing threat of embassy takeovers. The Office of Security, which would later become the Diplomatic Security Service (DSS), the law enforcement and security arm of the DOS, was the primary implementer of these new initiatives. Assaults on American embassies in Kuala Lumpur in 1975 by the Japanese Red Army and in Teheran and Tripoli in 1979 demonstrated the host government inability or unwillingness to protect our facilities and diplomats. Fifty-three American diplomats were held hostage in Teheran from November 4, 1979 until January 20, 1981. During this period, the DOS formulated the Security Enhancement Program to upgrade security at certain embassies believed to be under significant threat. During the past twenty years, however, terrorist violence has increased and the number of casualties risen. Rogue states waging war via terrorist networks and non-state terrorist organizations with global reach have emerged, using an ever-broadening range of weapons and tactics.⁵

THE AGE OF TERRORISM BEGINS

On April 18, 1983, sixty-three people were killed and 120 injured when a suicide bomber drove a truck packed with 400 pounds of explosives into the lobby of the American Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. The terrorists responsible were members of Hizballah (aka Islamic Jihad), a Lebanon-based, radical Shi'a terrorist group supported by Iran and Syria. This same group would strike again: in October with the murder of 242 Americans in a suicide truck bombing at the U.S. Marine Barracks; in December when an explosives-laden truck crashed into the American Embassy compound in Kuwait, killing six; and in September of the following year at the U.S. Embassy Annex in Beirut.⁶ Primarily as a result of these bombing incidents, stringent physical security measures to counter the threats from vehicle borne improvised explosive devices were devised and implementation begun.

In 1985, Secretary of State George Schultz tasked the Inman Advisory Panel on Overseas Security, headed by retired U.S. Navy Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, to evaluate embassy security. The resulting report addressed 126 posts worldwide and contained almost 100 recommendations for changes in embassy design and location. Among the factors not considered by the panel were geographic location, political climate, and local threat situation. Recommendations for new building construction included:

- a minimum 100-foot setback from vehicular traffic,
- remote locations situated away from downtown areas,
- building sites of fifteen acres or more, and
- a minimal number of windows.

Even though DOS received the largest appropriation in its history, these “Inman standards” were never fully funded by Congress. As the Beirut bombings faded from memory and no new attacks occurred, terrorism fell off the public screen.⁷

Inman projects were characterized by their colossal size, their relative isolation, and their huge cost. Some DOS officials described the new security standards as “overkill”. If Inman standards were to be “grandfathered”, DOS would be forced to vacate downtown embassies, like London, Paris, and Rome, for example, and move to more secure buildings and sites, undoubtedly no longer in center city locations. The costs would not only be immense; they would be impossible to fund. So, a realization that no building can be perfectly protected, combined with funding considerations, eventually led to a reevaluation of the Inman standards. DOS gradually moved from blanket enforcement of security regulations to a case-by-case evaluation of embassies and consulates. This not only meant that many symbolic yet vulnerable U.S. missions would remain at their current sites, but DOS could also rent and renovate existing buildings in countries where new construction was deemed unfeasible or undesirable.⁸

Although imposing walled compounds were eventually built at ten locations in South America and the Middle and Far East, of the fifty-seven projects planned in 1986, only seven were completed by September 1991. And as of August 1998, only 49 of the 126 recommended facilities had been built or remodeled to meet the enhanced Inman standards. To make matters worse, many embassies built or purchased after 1985 did not meet the Inman standards either. DOS gave waivers to the security standards in over three quarters of these new embassies.⁹

The embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania were two of these facilities. On August 7, 1998, at approximately 10:36 a.m., a suicide bomber detonated a truck full of explosives at the top of a ramp leading to the Nairobi embassy’s underground parking garage. The explosion killed 291 people, including 44 embassy employees, and injured almost 5000, including 19 members of the embassy staff. At about 10:39 a.m., another truck bomb was driven to within fifty feet of the American Embassy in Dar es Salaam and detonated by the suicide bomber. Ten people died, including three embassy employees, and 77 were injured, including one American employee.¹⁰ Although both buildings survived, they sustained significant structural damage.

The acting Deputy Chief of Mission in the Nairobi embassy at the time of the attack reflected later:

Thus, 15 years after the Beirut bombings, Embassy Nairobi was still located on a curb of two of the city's major thoroughfares, a sitting duck for a car or truck bomb. It took a new employee less than a minute to realize the chancery was vulnerable...we deemed the threat of terrorism less in Nairobi and East Africa than in other more turbulent parts of the world. We did not foresee that Middle East terrorists...had concluded that as U.S. embassies were increasingly well protected in their own region, they would go after the more vulnerable ones, such as our embassies in East Africa...(Our system) devoted the lion's share of attention and resources to the most visible, pressing issues of the day, neglecting what seem to be less urgent problems...Will we be better able (in the future) to do what is needed to make our diplomats secure overseas, if the threat once again seems over time to recede?¹¹

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Twelve years prior to the east Africa embassy terrorist bombings, Congress passed the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Anti-Terrorism Act of 1986, P.L. 99-399. Section 103 states that the Secretary of State must convene an Accountability Review Board (ARB) whenever:

- 1) there is a security-related incident involving a U.S. mission abroad which results in either loss of life, serious injury, or significant destruction of property;
- 2) there is a breach of security at an overseas mission involving the intelligence activities of a foreign government; or
- 3) a visa is issued to an individual who is included in the consular lookout system and there is thereafter probable cause to believe that the individual participated in a terrorist activity in the U.S. which resulted in serious injury, loss of life, or significant destruction of property.

The ARB should focus on whether, at the time of the incident, there were sufficient security systems in place and whether they were properly implemented. An ARB will also determine whether anyone should be held responsible for the incident. The Department of State is required to submit a report to the Congress responding to any recommendations by an ARB.¹²

Secretary of State Madelaine Albright convened the ARBs on October 5, 1998. Retired Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr. was named chairman for both boards, because of common links between the two bombings, including timing, suspected perpetrators, and relevant embassy security issues in question. In January 1999, the ARBs reported their findings. Although security systems and procedures for physical security met prescribed DOS standards for post rated at the medium or low threat for terrorism, the standards themselves did not adequately address the threat of large vehicular bomb attacks and were inadequate to protect against such attacks. In addition, the DOS did not apply the existing standards as fully as it should have. In many locations worldwide, standards implementation was "to the maximum extent feasible," applying "risk management." Neither embassy met the 100-foot setback requirement, because

both were occupied before the standard was adopted, so it was waived. Waivers for setback and other problematic security standards were routine, reflecting inadequate funding to replace all sub-standard buildings. “In light of the August 7 bombings, these general exceptions to the setback requirement in particular mask a dangerous level of exposure to similar attacks elsewhere.”¹³

The ARBs issued many key recommendations, noting that all of these key items were urgent and needed immediate action. These recommendations included:

- The DOS’ physical security standards for diplomatic overseas missions should be revised to reflect a worldwide threat to every post from transnational terrorism using a wide variety of weapons, including large vehicle bombs.
- The Secretary of State should personally review embassy security, closing those facilities that are highly vulnerable and cannot be secured. Employees should be relocated to secure permanent facilities or secure temporary facilities pending construction on new buildings built to standards.
- The physical security standards themselves should be reviewed immediately and revised to adequately address the threat of large bomb attacks.
- The DOS should obtain sufficient, fenced funding (estimated at \$1.4 billion per year for the next ten years) for capital building programs and other security-related operations. “A failure to do so will jeopardize the security of US personnel abroad and inhibit America’s ability to protect and promote its interests around the world.”¹⁴

PHYSICAL SECURITY ENHANCEMENT ACTIONS

Congress acted quickly and proposed new statutory security requirements for American diplomatic facilities overseas. The DSS began work on revising physical security standards for missions worldwide. On November 29, 1999, President Clinton signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act (FY2000) Public Law 106-113. Title VI of P.L. 106-113 is commonly referred to as the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act (SECCA) of 1999. Title VI authorized appropriations for the purpose of acquiring, or providing major security enhancements to, U. S. diplomatic facilities in order to meet specified, statutory security requirements involving setback and collocation. Section 606 stipulated that when selecting a site for any new diplomatic facility, all U.S. government personnel at post (except for those under the command of an area military commander) will be collocated within the facility unless an agency-specific waiver is approved by the Secretary of State and the head of the agency affected. Newly acquired diplomatic facilities will be sited at least 100 feet from the perimeter of

the property on which it is situated. If the Secretary determines security considerations warrant and it is in the national interest, the Secretary may waive the requirement. The Secretary must notify the appropriate Congressional committees in writing when any chancery or consulate setback or collocation waiver is issued, along with the reasons for the waiver, fifteen days prior to implementation. (NOTE: For Calendar Year 2000, the Secretary of State granted one waiver for setback for the new chancery in Luanda, noting that the new office building design met blast protection equivalent to a 100 foot setback. No waivers were granted by the Secretary in Calendar Year 2001. For Calendar Year 2002, five waivers were granted for Dar es Salaam, Sao Paulo, Sofia, Tbilisi, and Yerevan.¹⁵) In addition, Section 605 directed the Secretary to report annually for five years to the appropriate congressional committees an identification of U. S. diplomatic facilities that are priority for replacement or for major security enhancement because of vulnerability to terrorist attack, setting these posts out in groups of twenty, from the most vulnerable to the least vulnerable. Account funds appropriated were to be dedicated to facilities in the first four groups.¹⁶

DOS had already established in 1997 a process for prioritizing capital construction projects. At the time of the East Africa embassy bombings, DOS was vetting its priority list. The bombings prompted a change in methodology for determining construction priorities based on newly-formulated, vulnerability-related criteria. National Security Council-sponsored, interagency Embassy Security Assessment Teams led by the DSS visited thirty-two posts and made recommendations for setting priorities. A total of 281 overseas facilities were analyzed taking into account factors such as setback, building construction and structure, as well as its proximity to hostile elements, host country border security and host government capacity to protect. The result was the Global Facility Security Vulnerability Assessment Model (SAM). SAM's vulnerability list now needed an injection of operational reality.¹⁷

DOS regional bureaus and functional offices, as well as other stakeholders and interested parties such as the U. S. Information Agency, the U. S. Agency for International Development, and the Foreign Commercial Service, were given an opportunity to voice their concerns. Issues such as project executability or do-ability, site availability, and local political conditions also needed to be considered before priorities could be made. The first congressional report for FY2000 which resulted from this process was produced in February. By that time, new embassy projects for Nairobi and Dar es Salaam had already been funded. The priority list, in bands of twenty, reflected DSS' vulnerability ratings, with some adjustments made by senior DOS management. Eight facilities were funded for FY2000, two for FY2001

and eight for FY2002. Almost fifty additional New Office Building projects are at the design or site acquisition phase.¹⁸

The DSS revised physical security standards applicable for U.S. diplomatic facilities overseas. The new standards were effective as of December 17, 1999 and changes to minimum requirements for chanceries and consulates included the following:

- Perimeter walls and fences will be constructed to provide anti-ram protection to all areas that are accessible to vehicle approaches to prevent or limit vehicle penetration,
- Traffic lanes will be between ten and twelve feet in width, with a gate and active anti-ram barriers as a means of containing a halted vehicle during vehicle inspection or identification,
- New office buildings [defined in the Department of State Foreign Affairs Handbook Number 5, Volume 12, Section H-113, page 35 (12 FAH-5 H-113, p. 35) as “Office building or compound constructed by or on behalf of USG which was at the 35% design development stage subsequent to June 1991”] and newly acquired buildings [defined in Section H-114, page 36 (12 FAH-5 H-114, p. 36) as “Office building not constructed by or on behalf of USG which was acquired by purchase, lease, or other means subsequent to June 1991”] will provide a minimum standoff distance of 100 feet between the protected side of the perimeter barrier and the building exterior.
- Existing office buildings (defined by 12 FAH-5 H-112, p. 35 as “DOS-designed office buildings or compounds which were at 35% design development stage prior to July 1991 or office buildings or compounds not designed by DOS which were acquired through purchase, lease, or other means prior to July 1991”) will provide a minimum standoff distance of 100 feet to the maximum extent feasible.
- A clear zone extending 20 feet from the perimeter wall on new office building and newly acquired building compounds, free of auxiliary buildings, parking or man-made obstructions will be provided. Existing office buildings will comply to the maximum extent feasible,
- Employee parking at new office buildings will be located at least 20 feet from the building; at newly acquired buildings 50 feet; and at existing buildings to the maximum extent feasible. There will be no unauthorized visitor parking inside the compound.

Other changes to standards relating to building and window construction, uniform application of shatter resistant window film, ballistic resistance and forced entry protection, blast mitigation, and interior safe havens were also incorporated.¹⁹

It should be noted that feasibility as used above is determined by the following: (1) Physical limitations: This refers to the structural, electrical, and mechanical limitations of the building as well as the lack of a 100 foot setback/standoff zone; (2) Legal constraints: Zoning laws and similar ordinances of the host country sometimes limit the ability of a post to implement the measures required by the standards. In those cases, the efforts of post and the position of the host government and A/FBO (DOS' Foreign Buildings Office) will be made matters of record with DS/PSP/PSD (DSS' Physical Security Division); and (3) Practicality: In some cases, the cost of installing all of the necessary security features may almost equal the replacement value of the building. When this is the case, the net gain in security over existing conditions must be weighed against the threat and the cost. DS/PSP/PSD and A/FBO must be party to any decision to proceed with or abort an upgrade project where there are questions concerning practicality.²⁰

MORE THAN JUST BUILDINGS

DSS management realized that it would take more than just changes in embassy and consulate locations and physical security improvements to address vulnerability issues for U. S. government employees overseas.

The Surveillance Detection Program was implemented as a direct result of the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam chancery bombings. Investigators had determined that al Qaeda operatives had conducted detailed pre-operational surveillance over an extended period of time at both locations preceding the bombings. Had U. S. government assets been in place, trained to know what to look for, the tragedies may have been averted. Detecting surveillance is an important defensive measure to thwart future attacks. The first Surveillance Detection Teams (SDTs) were trained and deployed in 1999. The SDTs are comprised of local nationals, either individuals direct-hired by the mission, or provided by a security contractor, who operate under the direct supervision of the DSS Regional Security Officer at post. They work in plainclothes, on foot and in unmarked vehicles, as an almost invisible element poised to detect suspicious activities that often precede an attack. Utilizing tools such as digital and video cameras, night vision devices and even disguises, they conduct their operations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There are over 220 SDTs currently operating at foreign service posts around the world. They have been responsible for identifying surveillance, terrorist and criminal, which has resulted in detentions, arrests, and in some cases deportations. Several of the more celebrated "foiled" terrorist plots which have appeared in the news over the past few years were the result of the initial efforts of an SDT.²¹

It is important to note that surveillance detection is the act of determining whether surveillance is being conducted against a particular target. It is a defensive security measure that can be conducted by an individual or a specifically designed operation by a trained team. It is not counter-surveillance, which is a security and intelligence operation designed to determine the existence of hostile surveillance activity prior to operational activity, and attempt to counter-act or disrupt the pre-operational surveillance. Counter-surveillance is not an authorized activity for these DSS surveillance detection teams or individuals. The program operates with the knowledge and consent of the host government as a defensive security operation only.²²

There were procedural changes mandated as well. For those chanceries and consulates situated on compounds, vehicle access procedures were expanded and strictly enforced. All vehicles were inspected prior to entry. This included driver identification, visual inspection of the interior and exterior of the vehicle, and use of the Itemiser Detection and Identification System, which detects trace amounts of all of the commonly used explosives, with a response time of ten seconds per sample. The enhanced vehicle inspection procedures lessen the possibility of vehicle borne explosive attack on the facility, as well as an improvised explosive device being introduced surreptitiously in or under the vehicle of an unsuspecting employee. The entire inspection regimen, conducted for every vehicle, is also a deterrent should terrorists be conducting pre-operational surveillance.

Visitor screening and access control procedures were enhanced. All visitors to the mission now need to be issued a temporary identification badge on arrival and escorted while in the building. Visa applicants generally need pre-scheduled appointments; walk in applications are a thing of the past. All visitors must pass through a walk through metal detector, have their carry articles physically searched and x-rayed, and check any electronic items, including cell phones and palm pilots, before proceeding past the inspection area. The newly-deployed/-upgraded X-ray equipment is state-of-the-art, with "back-scatter" capability to detect plastic explosives themselves, as well as the usual batteries, wires, detonators, timers and other circuitry commonly used in the construction of improvised explosive devices. External and internal closed circuit television cameras allow local guards and Marine Security Guards to monitor and record all of the activity that the cameras see. Many missions have access card control systems, which limit employee and visitor access throughout the entire building and activate alarms when unauthorized access is attempted or gained.

Additional and improved alarm and public address systems at virtually all embassies and consulates have been installed to alert employees to impending emergency situations. Older emergency notification systems had four alert tones for emergencies such as fire, bomb and

terrorist or intruder, in response to which employees took different actions. The new “duck and cover” systems have two alternatives: take immediate cover and stay there until told otherwise, or evacuate the building. The duck and cover system can be activated by the Marine Security Guard, the Regional Security Officer, the local guard in the compound or vehicle inspection area, or remotely by the SDT, should it identify an immediate threat. This improvement was yet another lesson learned from Nairobi, when employees went to windows to see what the small explosion was that preceded the truck bomb detonation.

The most important security improvement implemented by DSS since the 1998 embassy bombings was the continued pressure on DOS management for authorization and funding to hire more Special Agents, Security Engineering Officers, and Security Technicians to run and administer the new overseas programs and policies DSS was creating. As of January 1, 2003, DSS has 1225 special agents (including 263 new hires and 92 special agents in training) on duty, 527 of whom are assigned as regional security officers at 195 posts in 156 countries. This is in stark contrast to the total force of 639 special agents on the job in August 1998, 269 of whom were assigned overseas.²³ In his February 6, 2003 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in support of the President’s International Affairs Budget request for Fiscal Year 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell stated:

The FY 2004 Diplomatic and Consular Programs request also provides \$646.7 million for Worldwide Security Upgrades—an increase of \$93.7 million over last year. This total includes \$504.6 million to continue worldwide security programs for guard protection, physical security equipment and technical support, information and system security, and security personnel and training. It also includes \$43.4 million to expand the perimeter security enhancement program for 232 posts and \$98.7 million for improvements in domestic and overseas protection programs, including 85 additional agents and other security professionals.²⁴

SO...IS IT SAFE?

Unfortunately, no.

In the year following the August 7 Nairobi and Dar es Salaam embassy attacks, DOS did receive \$1.4 billion dollars from Congress to beef up embassy security worldwide. The Director of DOS’ Diplomatic Security Service, Peter Bergin, was quoted as saying, “We’ve made improvements at every single post around the world.”²⁵ Yet, the American embassy in Antananarivo, Madagascar was closed for most of the month of June, 1999 due to suspected, pre-operational surveillance of the embassy compound by al-Qaeda operatives. In fact, six embassies in Africa were temporarily closed as a result of terrorist threats during that month

alone. During the first twelve months following the east Africa bombings, a total of sixty-seven American embassies and consulates around the world were closed for some period of time due to security-related concerns.²⁶

During calendar year 1999, three U.S. diplomatic facilities were the targets of significant terrorist attacks. On March 28, a vehicle containing two terrorists stopped in front of the U.S. embassy in Moscow. The terrorists attempted to fire two rocket propelled grenade launchers at the front of the building. Both failed to function, after which the terrorists fired automatic weapons and fled the scene. Neither terrorist was apprehended. On June 4, Turkish police killed two members of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party Front (DHKP/C, formerly known as Dev-Sol) who were discovered in the vicinity of the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul with a light antitank weapon (LAW) rocket. DHKP/C later issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attempted attack on the Consulate to protest America's attack on Yugoslavia. (In 1992, Dev-Sol fired rockets at the consulate in Istanbul causing minor damage but no casualties). On November 12, unidentified terrorists fired seven rockets at the American Embassy, the American Center and the Saudi-Pak Tower building, which housed United Nations offices, in downtown Islamabad, injuring six and causing minor damage.²⁷

Intelligence reporting confirmed that Middle Eastern terrorist groups and their state sponsors continued to conduct training and planning for terrorist acts throughout 2000. Violence between Israel and the Palestinian Authority resulted in anti-U.S. rhetoric, operational activity, and occasionally violent demonstrations against U.S. facilities. Several planned terrorist operations against Israeli and U.S. targets in the Middle East were uncovered and disrupted. After two Islamic Jihad members convicted of planning a 1998 attack against the U.S. embassy in Cairo were executed, Egyptian authorities increased security at the embassy in Cairo and other official facilities, based on investigations of several terrorist threats.²⁸

The Government of Kuwait cooperated in a regional effort to uncover and disrupt an international terrorist cell, arresting more than a dozen people and recovering a large cache of weapons and explosives. The cell was planning to attack Kuwaiti officials and U.S. targets in Kuwait and in the region. In response to terrorist threats, Jordanian security forces augmented support at the U.S. embassy facilities in Amman in June, successfully averting any violence. Several threats against U.S. military and civilian personnel and facilities in Saudi Arabia were reported during the year, but there were no confirmed terrorist incidents. Usama bin Laden continued to publicly threaten U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia, including a video tape released in September.²⁹ Even though no successful terrorist attacks were conducted against U.S.

diplomatic facilities overseas in 2000, there were embassy and consulate closures during the year, based on viable threat information.

American diplomatic facilities continued to be targets for terrorism in 2001, both before and after the terrorist attacks of September 11. In January, Italian investigators developed information regarding planned attacks on U.S. government facilities in Italy. The U.S. embassies in Rome and the Vatican City, as well as consulates in Milan and Naples, were temporarily closed as a precaution. Police identified and later arrested Sami Ben Khemais Essid and five north Africans in connection with the terrorist plot against the U.S. embassy in Rome. Essid, leader of the Tunisian Combatant Group, had spent two years in Afghanistan, trained as a recruiter for al Qaeda, and was believed to be the head of al Qaeda's operations and planning cell in Italy. Essid maintained ties with terrorists associated with the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and the 1998 east African embassy bombings.³⁰

The U.S. embassy in Doha, Qatar was reportedly under surveillance in March by al Qaeda operatives planning an attack. (Qatari law enforcement authorities had already arrested at least one al Qaeda member in late 2000.)³¹ In December, Singapore authorities arrested thirteen members of Jemaah Islamiyah (Islamic Group) after a lengthy investigation. Eight of the thirteen trained in al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. The terrorists had photographed the U.S. embassy in Singapore and conducted extensive surveillance on the embassy and other diplomatic targets as well. Evidence indicated that planning for the attacks began in 1997. Procurement had begun for twenty-one tons of explosives, most of which was on hand. As a result of the arrests in Singapore, the Government of the Philippines discovered and thwarted another related terrorist plot in that country, seizing more than a ton of TNT and explosive initiators.³²

2002 began with a different sort of plot against an American embassy. In February, Italian authorities arrested four Moroccan nationals and confiscated about nine pounds of a cyanide compound and a map showing the exact access points for underground gas and water pipes running into the U.S. embassy in Rome. Investigators discovered a recently-opened hole in the wall of an underground passageway adjacent to the embassy, which could have provided surreptitious access to the embassy's internal gas tanks. Police determined that the cyanide compound could have easily been turned into a deadly gas.³³

On June 14, a terrorist crashed an explosives-laden vehicle into a guard post outside the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, Pakistan. Eleven people were killed and at least twenty-five others injured. The blast incinerated nearby vehicles and sent debris flying over one-half mile from the blast site. The previously-unknown group claiming responsibility for the blast, al-Qanoon,

warned of further attacks.³⁴ Two Pakistanis with links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban were arrested a month later and admitted they were behind the attacks. The two claimed membership in Harkat ul-Mujahdeen al-Almi, a group that has long been on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations.³⁵

Warnings of possible large-scale terrorist attacks against U.S. overseas facilities by al Qaeda cells in Southeast Asia, suicide bombers in the Middle East, and other random attacks by freelance, low-level al Qaeda operatives trained in Afghanistan terror camps to coincide with the first anniversary of the September 11th attacks led to a U.S. government worldwide caution. The threat information originated from a senior al Qaeda member in custody and other sources.³⁶

German authorities thwarted a possible September 11 attack on the U.S. military base in Heidelberg. Indicators pointed to additional imminent attacks on other U.S. military installations and embassies being planned by organized and well-financed terrorist cells. As the symbolic date approached, U.S. and allied intelligence had discovered intensified activity by al Qaeda soldiers and operatives in many of the ninety-five countries in which the organization is known to be present, most of which also have U.S. diplomatic or military facilities or both. Magnus Ransterp, a counterterrorist expert and director of the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St. Andrew in Scotland, opined, "Of course the U.S. embassies, military and diplomatic installations are primary targets. They are easy targets to hit, and there is a clear and present danger."³⁷ And on December 14, in Amman, Jordan, Jordanian Information Minister Mohammad Affash Adwan issued a statement subsequent to the December 3 arrests of a Libyan, Salem Saad bin Suweid, and a Jordanian, Yasser Fatih Ibrahim, relating to the killing of USAID administrator Laurence Foley outside his Amman home in October. Both suspects admitted belonging to al Qaeda. Adwan's statement maintained that Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, reportedly an al Qaeda senior commander, assigned to orchestrate attacks in Europe, supplied the two suspects with weapons, grenades, and money to carry out terrorist attacks against embassies and foreign diplomats.³⁸

AND WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN THE FUTURE?

On November 15, 2001, Brian Jenkins, terrorism expert and Senior Advisor to the President of the Rand Corporation, testified before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and opined the following:

Turning first to the current and near-term threats, Bin Laden's Al Qaeda network will almost certainly attempt further major terrorist operations against American targets abroad and, potentially, here. We know that the September 11th attack was years in planning, which means that preparations for it overlapped the attacks on the American embassies in Africa and the U.S.S. Cole, as well as the foiled attempt to carry out terrorist attacks here during the millennium celebrations. The terrorist leaders also would know that the September 11th attack would provoke a military response, which they could then characterize as an assault on Islam. In other words, the terrorist leaders did not intend September 11th to be their last act—they intended it as the beginning of their end-game. Therefore, they would have made plans to survive the anticipated military response and continue to communicate, and they may have set in motion terrorist operations that will occur weeks or months or years from now, unless we can identify and destroy every terrorist cell...In terms of targets abroad, diplomatic facilities and corporate symbols of America will bear the brunt of terrorist attacks.³⁹

During a speech on December 14, 2001 commemorating Jerusalem Day, former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani warned that Palestine suicide bombers, embracing martyrdom, might target U.S. assets worldwide. Rafsanjani continues to hold a high position in the Iranian government and could be aware of plans for an operation conducted by Hamas, an extremist Palestinian group with close ties to Iran (Iran has been involved with, and provided funding to, Hamas since 1993.) Hamas reportedly would benefit from U.S. deaths in an attack on U.S. assets by ensuring U.S. support for the current Israeli government's aggressive military policies toward the Palestinian Authority, whose leadership Hamas seeks to change. Since Hamas has limited strike capabilities in the U.S., and Hamas sympathizers and infrastructure in the region, the best targets would be in or near Israel. The most dramatic targets would be U.S. embassies, consulates or cultural centers with large American populations.⁴⁰

Delivering their annual report to Congress on worldwide threats, CIA Director George Tenet and the intelligence chiefs from the Departments of Defense, State, and Justice testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on February 9, 2002. In the first public assessments since the September 11th attacks addressing suspected terrorist plots and capabilities around the world, DCI Tenet stated al Qaeda cells in place already have plans to strike U.S. and allied targets in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. U.S. diplomatic and military facilities were reportedly at high risk, especially in East Africa, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Tenet averred that a clear and present danger exists. Specific plots to bomb U.S. embassies in France, Turkey, Singapore, Yemen, Bosnia and other unspecified locations were uncovered and disrupted since 9/11.⁴¹

Nearly three years before DCI Tenet's testimony, Admiral Crowe made the following statements in the introduction to the ARB report:

Successful overseas terrorist attacks kill our people, diminish confidence in our power, and bring tragedy to our friends in host countries. When choosing embassy sites, safety and security concerns should guide our considerations more than whether a location may be convenient or of historic, symbolic importance. Most host countries want US embassies to be safe. If they don't, then we probably shouldn't be there. There is every likelihood that there will be further large bomb and other kinds of attacks. We must face this fact and do more to provide security or we will continue to see our people killed, our embassies blown away, and the reputation of the United States overseas eroded.⁴²

Yet in a later interview, Crowe, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom, expressed dismay that the London embassy might someday have to move from its prominent, prestigious Grosvenor Square location. And Philip C. Wilcox, former coordinator for counterterrorism at DOS and a member of Crowe's ARB, was quoted as saying, "Some buildings of great historic value are treasures to be preserved. We can afford to make exceptions to the Inman standards where environmental factors combine to minimize risk and host governments and their law enforcement and intelligence services have a proven record against terrorism."⁴³ The reality is when political will is strong, any and all security standards, regulations, and considerations can be overlooked or disregarded. History has shown that significant loss of life can only temporarily change the priorities.

AND THE ANSWER IS...?

Physical and procedural security as currently implemented at U.S. overseas missions worldwide by the DOS is a deterrent at best. When terrorist operatives conducting pre-operational surveillance (who may be aware they themselves are likely to be surveilled) observe a uniformed host government police presence, substantial compound perimeter walls, well-lit, with anti-access features and CCTV cameras covering all areas, physical search and explosives detection inspection of all vehicles requiring entrance to the compound, a formidable, solidly-constructed facility with open, well-lit grounds surrounding it and no parking permitted near or under the building, guards uniformly checking employee's and visitors' identification, visitors subject to personal search, as well as inspection and x-ray of their possessions, and an armed United States Marine Security Guard standing behind a bullet-proof glass providing final screening and positive access control for everyone, they may decide to look for a softer target,

where the likelihood of mission success may be greater. Robert E. Lamb, a retired Foreign Service Officer who served as the first Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security from 1987 to 1989 and U.S. ambassador to Cyprus, wrote, "This new form of terrorism has ushered in a new ruthlessness—and a new mobility. The two embassies selected in East Africa were chosen, not because they were involved in any way in the terrorists' grievances against the United States. They were not close to the home base of the perpetrators. They were chosen because they were vulnerable."⁴⁴

With the vast array of weapons available to the terrorist, including biological, chemical, and radiological weapons of mass destruction, and methods ranging from conventional armed assaults to suicide bombs to standoff attacks, all U.S. diplomatic missions overseas are, in the end, still vulnerable. Another former Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security (1989-1991), Sheldon J. Kryss, stated, "Perfect security means nobody's there at all." The original intent behind the Inman standards was to create a no-risk environment. DOS soon realized that some risk was inevitable. Security standards can only create low- to medium-risk facilities.⁴⁵

Prior knowledge concerning targeting activities, ongoing surveillance, or an impending terrorist attack against a U.S. diplomatic mission permits host government security and police authorities to intercede and eliminate the threat. Absent closing down facilities worldwide to eliminate terrorist threats to U.S. employees, and the embassies and consulates in which they work, deterrence is the only answer to the question of safety and security. It is practically impossible to permanently eliminate a trans-national organization actively engaged in terrorist operations. But disrupting the organization's plans and activities, hopefully on a consistent basis, is possible, as long as the right intelligence is available, shared and acted upon. Intelligence is the key.

Terrorist groups such as al Qaeda and Hizballah have been successful employing a wide range of communications, from one-on-one personal conversations to encrypted email messages. The group's unpredictability, coupled with a relatively flat organization composed of small cells in over sixty countries, limit the effectiveness of traditional technical collection methods.⁴⁶ The ease with which people, resources and information move across international borders has provided opportunities for recruitment and fundraising. Terrorist cells often contain members of more than one nationality. The movements of these loosely affiliated transnational terrorist networks are almost impossible to track. Because these extremists are highly motivated, ideologically committed, and operationally compartmented, infiltration of their organization, especially by Western agents, is extremely difficult. Understanding the frame of reference of the soldier, the lens through which he sees his world, and how he identifies

success are essential for accurate analysis. Human intelligence is key to understanding real and potential motivation, resolve, decision-making, capabilities, modus operandi, and culture. This intelligence will produce insights and facilitate decisions as to how best to disrupt a suspect group's plans.⁴⁷

Host country intelligence and law enforcement agencies are best positioned to acquire this essential information, and foreign government assistance is critical to preventing terrorist attacks. In U.S. embassies around the world, CIA stations and host country liaison organizations must increase and improve the exchange of intelligence information regarding terrorist organizations and potential threats to U.S. interests. DSS Regional Security Officers and FBI Legal Attaches must expand liaison with host country law enforcement agencies at all levels, as well as actively solicit information from volunteers and other sources. Intelligence is often perishable, so it must be shared and analyzed within the embassy, as well as transmitted to headquarters organizations for further analysis, as quickly as possible. The U.S. intelligence and law enforcement communities must be prepared to take advantage of real-time intelligence to effectively and consistently detect terrorist plans early and disrupt operations already underway. It has not been the case in the past. Interagency cooperation and information sharing must become more robust. Hopefully the new Department of Homeland Security will be successful in breaking down barriers and stovepipes within and between the intelligence and law enforcement agencies. The National Commission on Terrorism reported in "Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism":

The Law Enforcement community is neither fully exploiting the growing amount of information it collects during the course of terrorism investigations nor distributing that information effectively to analysts and policymakers. Although the FBI does promptly share warning information about specific terrorist threats with the CIA and other agencies, it is less likely to disseminate terrorist information that may not relate to an immediate threat even though this could be of immense long-term or cumulative value to the Intelligence Community.

As long as a lack of coordination, whether interagency or international, leaves gaps in counter-terrorism efforts, terrorist organizations will be undeterred, believing they can exploit these gaps to successfully attack.⁴⁸

For its part, the DSS has taken the first step. Under its Office of International Operations, DSS will establish an International Law Enforcement Center (ILEC) by the summer of 2003. The primary purpose of the ILEC is to facilitate the coordination of law enforcement,

security, and threat management information with other law enforcement and security agencies (federal, state, and local) with RSOs, DSS geographic Regional Directors, and the DOS. The 24-hour ILEC will provide real-time services to the aforementioned entities and to U.S. diplomatic and consular missions worldwide. These services will include crisis management assistance, RSO support, timely threat analysis, protective intelligence operational support, DSS protective detail support, and investigative support. Information will be shared outside of the DOS via nationally- and internationally-available law enforcement data bases and indices, such as the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), the Treasury Enforcement Communications System (TECS), the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS), and the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), as well as direct liaison with appropriate agencies and departments. The ILEC will be staffed by fourteen full-time special agents and eight contract investigative assistants and editors, and augmented with personnel from DSS' Threat Analysis, Protective Intelligence and Investigations, and Criminal Investigations Divisions. The ILEC will also support the publication of the DSS Daily Security Brief.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

As the United States continues to strengthen the defensive posture of the homeland, terrorist organizations are going to look for softer, but still high profile, targets. American embassies and consulates around the world are likely to be at the top of the list. Significant efforts have been, and continue to be, made to identify vulnerabilities. Physical security is the most problematic and most expensive of these. However, the United States does not have the unlimited resources required to protect against every conceivable threat worldwide. Therefore, diplomatic facilities requiring physical security upgrades were prioritized, based on risk assessments and a variety of other factors, including political considerations. These selected, new embassy and upgrade projects continue to be funded and completed. Other physical, procedural and information security answers to other identified vulnerabilities at all diplomatic missions have been implemented. American diplomatic facilities are now much safer places for the U.S. government employees who work in them. Unfortunately, all of these security precautions are merely deterrents to terrorists. And once a terrorist is prepared to die, there is no deterrence. So intelligence regarding terrorist planning and operations, properly disseminated and analyzed, is the only way to avert terrorist attacks and effectively protect U.S. employees and facilities abroad.

WORD COUNT=8,034

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¹⁸ Ibid.

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